

Crafting a Successful Bully Prevention Program

By Marlene R. McMurrer-Shank, Ed.D.



Bullying continues to be a serious problem in schools everywhere, and states are enacting laws that target bullying and harassment on campus.

According to the Family Equality Council (www.familyequality.org), 25 states currently have school anti-bullying and harassment laws; another 10 states and the District of Columbia have laws that prevent bullying and harassment based specifically on sexual orientation and gender identity. In addition, several state legislatures have proposed laws that require schools to establish anti-bullying policies and programs.

Therefore, education leaders and school business officials should ensure that the bully prevention program in

their district is comprehensive and is based on goals that correspond with the school's culture and community.

School and community involvement with comprehensive data collection and analysis are crucial to creating a safe community for all students.

School and Community Involvement

Making school a safe place is the responsibility of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community. All faculty, staff, and students must learn what bullying is, how to prevent it, and what to do when they witness a bullying incident.

The members of the support staff who see students throughout the day—such as bus drivers, custodians,

and food service workers—should participate in the training as well. Many bullies believe that only teachers will see and stop their behavior. Empowering support staff to recognize and deal more effectively with bully behavior will decrease the number of incidences.

Part of the training for students should include helping them understand that they can tip the balance of power away from bullies.

Part of the training for students should include helping them understand that they can tip the balance of power away from bullies. As bystanders, they can step in and help one another as well as the victims. Programs such as teen court, peer mediation, and crime stoppers are ways for students to get involved in solving conflicts before they become violent.

The program should extend beyond physical bullying on school grounds to include cyberbullying as well.

Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) describe four components of a successful school violence-prevention program focused on bullying:

- A zero-tolerance policy for bullying behavior,
- A plan for modeling appropriate behavior,
- A physical education component designed to teach self-regulation of impulsive behavior, and
- A mentoring program through which adults and peers help students prevent bullying.

This program focused on discipline referrals, suspensions, and academic achievement. It resulted in a 50% reduction in disciplinary referrals, a decrease in suspension rates, and an increase in achievement test scores.

Data Management

Data management and effective communication tools will keep school officials and the community apprised of the school's or district's progress in preventing bullying.

Data collection systems should include quantitative information, such as the number of students disciplined and reported for bullying from one semester to the next, as well as a comparison of grade levels, sex, ethnic groups, and grade point averages.

School officials can obtain qualitative data by administering climate surveys immediately after the initial training and again at the end of the school year. These data will reveal how parents, students, and staff perceive the program's effectiveness and will help school officials

determine where the program is working and where it needs improvement.

Keys to Success

At a minimum, schools and districts should implement the following eight steps toward establishing an effective anti-bullying program:

1. Form a schoolwide committee
2. Collect and analyze preprogram data
3. Plan and present schoolwide assemblies
4. Plan and present community and parent assemblies
5. Increase teacher involvement with comprehensive training and materials
6. Plan and develop methods for reporting data analysis to stakeholders
7. Solicit and consider feedback from all stakeholders
8. Analyze postimplementation data and make revisions as needed

If a school district does not have a structured pilot-program strategy or policy in place, each school that pilots any type of program should be guided by school-level administration. The district should identify someone to oversee and coordinate the efforts of all pilot programs for all schools. District-level coordination and supervision give structure and accountability for pilot programs districtwide, thereby increasing the body of knowledge and scientific standardization of accountability and feedback to all stakeholders for each school site.

Reference

Dake, J. A., J. H. Price, and S. K. Telljohann. 2003. The nature and extent of bullying at school. *Journal of School Health* 73 (5): 173–80.

Marlene R. McMurrer-Shank, Ed.D., is a seventh grade science teacher and adjunct instructor at St. Leo University, Ocala, Florida. Email: mrm7795@gmail.com

PROMOTING SAFE SCHOOLS

The National School Safety Center offers a variety of resources and strategies to help educators establish safe school environments that promote learning. Strategies include:

- Make safe schools a district and community priority. Stress that quality education requires safe, peaceful schools. Work with community leaders to promote safe schools.
- Keep up to date with school safety trends and exemplary programs.
- Establish a district-wide mandatory incident reporting system.
- Make time for parents whenever they request a meeting to discuss a concern about the safety of their child.

Learn more at www.schoolsafety.us